Public Participation Best Practices in Environmental Decision-making in Newfoundland and Labrador: Analyzing the Forestry Management Planning Process

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Abstract : Public participation may improve the quality of environmental management decisions. However, the quality of such a decision is strongly dependent on the quality of the process that leads to it. In order to ensure an effective and efficient process, key features of best practice in participation should be carefully observed; this would also combat disillusionment of citizens, decision-makers and practitioners. The overarching aim of this study is to determine what constitutes an effective public participation process relevant to the Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada context, and to discover whether the public participation process that led to the 2014-2024 Provincial Sustainable Forest Management Strategy (PSFMS) met best practices criteria. The research design uses an exploratory case study strategy to consider a specific participatory process in environmental decision-making in Newfoundland and Labrador. Data collection methods include formal semi-structured interviews and the review of secondary data sources. The results of this study will determine the validity of a specific public participation best practice framework. The findings will be useful for informing citizen participation processes in general and will deduce best practices in public participation in environmental management in the province. The study is, therefore, meaningful for guiding future policies and practices in the management of forest resources in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and will help in filling a noticeable gap in research compiling best practices for environmentally related public participation processes.